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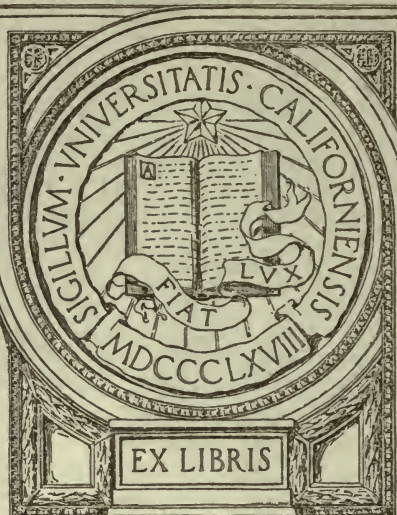
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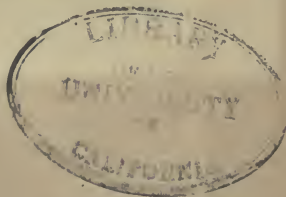
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THE
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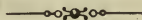
Founded in 1854, by **FREDERICK DENISON MAURICE.**

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THE BEGINNINGS OF THE WORKING MEN'S COLLEGE.



THE WORKING MEN'S COLLEGE began its career in 1854. To make its origin intelligible to the present generation—and it is chiefly for young men that I am now asked to write—I must recall shortly some of the circumstances of the time. To set forth these fully would be a considerable task for a historian: I will only mention two or three of the points wherein the then England differed from that which we know.

We are now living, practically, under a democracy. Fifty years ago, the great body of the working classes had no real share in the government of the country. The great Reform Act of 1832 had left them out in the cold. In political life they did not count, except as a great amorphous mass, liable to dangerous outbreaks of disorder, a mass which had to be governed and kept steady by the classes holding political power. Not till 1867, when the Derby-Disraeli Reform Act brought in household suffrage in boroughs, and 1884-5 when this was extended to counties, did that exclusion come to an end. But all through the middle of the century, the agitation which led up to those great changes was going on. The years just preceding and following 1848 were a time of much unrest. At the beginning of that year we seemed to be on the edge of a great upheaval. The French Revolution of February had upset the Bourbon monarchy; and the wave of democracy which swept over Europe gave fresh impetus to the Chartist agitation here. On the memorable 10th of April, it looked as if we were to have a revolutionary outbreak on the Parisian pattern. From this we were saved, partly by an army of volunteer special constables, partly by the Duke of Wellington's discreet placing of his troops, and partly by the showers that fell upon Kennington Common. But, though the attempt to overawe Parliament by a "physical force" demonstration was a fiasco, the prospect remained a gloomy one. The political agitation was kept alive by a mass of bad social conditions. All England was stirred by the results of an enquiry, set going by the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper, into the condition of London operatives. This revealed to the upper classes the miseries of the "sweating system"—thousands of men, women, and children working in a state worse than that of slaves, at starvation wages. "Labour" and "Capital" were in a chronic state of war—war

of a sort worse than that so familiar to us, for the old "Combination laws" checked all reasonable forms of union among the workmen. Public Health legislation had only just begun, and many quarters of London were foul centres of disease, as foul as the "Jacob's Island" described by Dickens in the preface to "Oliver Twist." When cholera came, in '49 and '50, whole districts were found to be drinking sewage.

Amidst all these evils there sprang up a new phase of "co-operation," an effort promoted by a small group of men who were inspired by the leadership of FREDERICK DENISON MAURICE. He was then Chaplain of Lincoln's Inn and Professor of Theology at King's College. They were chiefly young barristers and law students, whom his teaching had gathered round him, and whom he had set to work among the poor of his own neighbourhood. Most of them had been in the habit of going to his house for weekly readings of the Bible. He and this little band of friends seeing how much the political and social troubles of the time turned upon conditions of work and wages, set to work to apply the principle of Co-operation in a somewhat new form. Their plan was to get bodies of workmen in the various trades to form self-governing associations, selling the produce of their labour directly to the public. The movement spread, and many such associations were started. Some had fair success, and lasted many years, others failed, the main obstacle to success being the difficulty of securing effective management, when the workers themselves were managers or appointed the managers. Thus, that particular type of co-operation had no permanent success. But the union in common social effort of a number of men drawn from quite different classes was fruitful in good. Maurice and his band of "Promoters" made close friendships among the tailors, boot makers, pianoforte makers, etc., who formed the first associations, and one result of their many meetings and discussions was to bring to the front the question of Education. And here we must remember how utterly different was the then state of popular education from what it is now. School Boards had not been heard of. Such popular education as there was—it had only lately begun to be subsidized by the State—was carried on in connection with churches and chapels, the Church of England clergy, to their lasting honour, doing most of it, as a charitable work. But it reached only a fraction of the people. It was then a common thing to meet working men, first-rate craftsmen and full of intelligence, who could barely write their names. When Mr. Forster was passing through Parliament the Elementary Education Act of 1870, he reckoned that even then—and in twenty years there had been some progress—not more than two out of five of the children that should have been at school were at school. And the teaching was limited to the merest elements of knowledge. It was no wonder that the co-operators cried out for better instruction. They felt how ill-equipped they were for dealing with great economic and political questions, such as the

rights of labour and the claims of workmen to the vote. To meet this demand in some degree, Evening Classes were started by the Promoters; and at length the idea took shape that an effort should be made to put education of a higher kind within the reach of working people. The Promoters heard of an attempt of this kind which was being made in Sheffield; and at a meeting in January, 1854, a resolution was passed, on the motion of Mr. Hughes, which is thus recorded: "That it be referred to the Committee on Teaching and Publication to name, and so far as they think fit, to carry out, a plan for the establishment of a People's College in connection with the Metropolitan Associations." That committee numbered 14 members, among whom were Mr. Maurice, Viscount Goderich (the present Marquis of Ripon), Charles Kingsley, Mr. J. M. Ludlow, Mr. Vansittart Neale, and Mr. Westlake. The Committee asked Mr. MAURICE to sketch out the plan of a College, which he did. An explanatory prospectus* was shortly afterwards put forth, and it was decided to start the College as soon as possible. It is from this point, Feb., 1854, that my personal recollections begin. I had then come up from Cambridge, and joined the company accustomed to meet in Mr. Maurice's dining-room in Queen Square. Frequent meetings were held all that spring and summer to discuss practical arrangements; and after the vacation, on 31st Oct., 1854, the College opened its doors to students. Its habitat was an old house in Red Lion Square, Holborn (No. 31), which had come into Mr. Maurice's hands for the purposes of a "Needlewomen's Association." That scheme had failed, and the house was unoccupied.

The programme of classes for the opening term was but a slender list as compared with what it soon became. Mr. Maurice taught on three evenings of the week. His subjects were "The Reign of King John, illustrated by Shakespeare's play"; "Political Terms, illustrated by English Literature," and (on Sunday Nights) "St. John's Gospel." Mr. Hughes, with Mr. Walsh, had a class on "Public Health"; and Mr. Ludlow, one on the "Law of Partnership." Mr. Brewer (the Professor Brewer afterwards so well known by his historical work) had a class in "The Geography of England as connected with its History." Mr. Furnivall taught English Grammar; Arithmetic and Algebra were shared by Mr. Westlake and myself; and there were classes in Geometry, Mechanics, Natural Philosophy, and Astronomy. An important item in the list was—

"Thursday, 7—9 ... Drawing ... Mr. RUSKIN."

He had not, I think, been known personally to any of the founders; but Mr. Furnivall had sent him a circular, and in response there came a letter offering to take a Drawing Class. Ruskin was at this time in his thirty-fifth year. The first two

* This is given in full in the narrative contributed by Mr. Furnivall to the WORKING MEN'S COLLEGE MAGAZINE, Oct. and Nov., 1860.

volumes of "Modern Painters" had made him famous some ten years earlier, and he had just completed "The Stones of Venice." His volunteered adhesion was of immense service. It not only gave a splendid start to the Art teaching, but helped the enterprise as a whole by letting the world know that one of the greatest Englishmen of the time was in active sympathy with it. It was through him that not long afterwards we had the help in the Art School of Burne Jones, Rossetti, Ford Madox Browne, and other artists. (Mr. Lowes Dickinson, who continued to teach for some sixteen years, was one of our original founders.) Others besides those I have named had taken an active part in the work preliminary to our start. Among these I particularly remember Mr. Llewelyn Davies, then Rector of a parish in Whitechapel, and Mr. Vansittart Neale, who had been and long continued to be one of the most devoted Co-operators, helping the cause magnificently by money as well as by personal work.

In 1857 the lease of 31, Red Lion Square, having come to an end, we moved into our present abode in Great Ormond Street, which was purchased, subject to a mortgage debt, by the help of a munificent gift of £500 from Mr. Maurice.

This is a dry account of how the College began: but I must say something as to the aspect the enterprise bore to people looking at it from a point of view prevalent at the time. There was then absolutely no means by which a working man or a poor man could get, in a systematic way, any education going beyond the bare elements of knowledge. In many parishes there were "night schools," partly for teaching boys and girls who had escaped the "national" schools, or who had passed the school age, partly for adults who had grown up without learning to read and write. But these only taught the "three Rs"—reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. There had been long an outcry for more schools and schoolmasters; indeed, most people talked as if they believed that, if only a good percentage of children could be got into school, crime and misery would disappear, and the millennium at once begin. But the idea that the sort of education enjoyed by the "upper classes" could be of any interest or use to men who have to earn their bread by common daily work seemed fantastic to ninety-nine people out of a hundred. It is true that "Mechanics' Institutes" had existed for some twenty years in London and many country towns; but these Institutes had greatly fallen away from their primitive ideal. It was a common complaint that they had become "middle classy" in their management and arrangements; that working men felt strange in them, and that they were more like tradesmen's club and reading rooms than places for education or study. And those in the great cities had gradually been becoming little more than places of entertainment, attracting audiences and members by light and humorous lectures, dancing classes, and so forth. Apart from these drawbacks, such educational work as the Institutes did was all in the shape of "lectures," not "teaching."

and the difference between the lecture, given to a big audience by a teacher having nothing to do personally with individual pupils, and the lesson given by a teacher talking in a class room to a small group of men, is all important. Some Institutes, certainly, had classes, but these were generally limited to quite rudimentary teaching.

Thus it is no stretch of language to say that, in 1854, the infant WORKING MEN'S COLLEGE offered working men what they had not had offered them before: it was virtually a unique institution.*

One leading feature of the College was that it wholly rejected the idea that the value of Education turns upon its usefulness in regard to a man's trade or profession, or in other words, upon its helping him to "get on." The plea addressed to working people by speakers or writers urging the importance of education was then most commonly of this kind. They would say, in effect, though wrapping it up in finer phrases: "Education will put you in the way of *improving your position*. If you are a clerk, for instance, knowing French may make a difference of ten shillings a week or more in the salary you can earn. Or, if you are an engineer, think of Stephenson and Arkwright. By being ingenious mechanists, they made great fortunes; they rose out of their class. Study mechanics, and you may do the same." This plausible doctrine Maurice would have none of. He always insisted that if knowledge and culture, science and literature are any good, the good is something apart from trade utility. He denounced, too, the pitiful fraud of dangling before the working man the prospects of "rising out of his class," when we know that this ambition, whether we call it worthy or unworthy, can succeed in only one in ten thousand cases. It was in this view, mainly, that for a long time we treated "technical" classes as outside of our province. And the principle was sound, though it is true that at that time the vast importance of improved technical education was not understood. Another distinctive feature was our relying to a great extent on unpaid teaching. The drawbacks and difficulties incident to this were soon felt, especially as regards the modern language classes, which soon became too large and numerous to be adequately managed and taught by men able to devote to them only the leisure hours of busy lives. But the unpaid teaching, nevertheless, brought with it advantages which went far to outweigh its obvious deficiencies. It at once put the relation between teachers and taught on a high

* I have checked my recollection herein by looking at an analysis made in 1859 of a published Report as to some 120 Mechanics' Institutes in Yorkshire. These had in some cases flourishing classes in music and drawing, but they did no other educational work worth mentioning. I should add that the "Evening Classes for Young Men" (Crosby Hall) had begun some little time before the College. These, after many years of excellent work, developed into the City of London College. They differed, however, in several ways from the Working Men's College, and the members were nearly all clerks and assistants in City Mercantile houses.

ground : emphasizing the principle of mutual help and mutual obligation on which the College was founded. (College men will not suppose that, in saying this, I am forgetting how much they have owed to the unwearied devotion of our professional teachers). That it should have been possible to get a constant succession of able volunteer teachers during nearly fifty years is perhaps surprising ; but it certainly is the fact that, whenever there has been a real and sufficient demand for teaching in this or that subject, there has rarely been a difficulty in finding the teacher. Classes have failed more often for lack of students than from lack of teachers.

Maurice insisted, too, on the significance of the word "College." He clung to it as importing a constant reminder of the intimate fellowship which was to bind together the teacher and the taught, a body of men "united together," to use his own words, "for high ends by other than mercenary bonds." All who knew the College in its early days will agree that the spirit expressed in these words soon began to be characteristic of the place ; and such it has remained ever since. No one person, I think, in those early days, did so much to impress this character on the College as Tom Hughes. As a teacher he did not do much, for his Law class or classes did not "draw" but he had a boxing class which was a great success, and his genial companionship with the men gave a great spurt to our social life. (It was about two years later that "Tom Brown School-Days" made him famous). I shall always remember him best as presiding at a weekly gathering of teachers and students in the Coffee Room, whereat everybody talked to everybody, and songs and recitations of poetry went round the table. It was rather like what used to be called a "harmonic meeting," save that there was no drink better than tea for years passed before we ventured, after immense debate (!) on what was thought at that time a daring measure in an institution of our sort, allowing a man to have a glass of beer with his supper. These gatherings, held in a grim attic at the top of the house, were an excellent means of bringing teachers and students together out of class hours. The same songs were sung over and over again. Two special favourites, I remember were "The Tight Little Island," the property of a much-loved brush-maker, Hurst, of the Latin class (who died in early middle life) ; and Hughes's "Little Billee," the funny song of Thackeray describing the adventures of the "three Sailors of Bristol Citee" who "took a boat and went to sea." This we were never tired of calling for. But it was the solid strength and simple manliness of Hughes's character, and not only the genial temper shown in these convivial meetings, that won him the attachment which made him a governing influence.

Not all teachers could spare time for mixing with students out of class time, but it soon became a settled tradition that the teacher should aim at knowing his men. Two things helped

to promote this intimate fraternization. One was that in the early time we were nearly all, broadly speaking, young together.* Another was the gradual sharing of the teaching work by students and ex-students. This began with the institution of "tutors" and "practice classes," to give men special help supplementary to the regular teaching, and of "Preparatory classes" to help on the less advanced students. In time a large part of the teaching, and of the management too, was done by men who had entered as students; and now for many years past these have formed a majority among the men sitting round the Council table. All which has impressed on the College a character which, so far as I know, is not to be found elsewhere.

One name to be specially remembered in recalling the first days of the College is that of Charles Kingsley, notwithstanding that, when it was once started, he took no part in its regular work. His duties as Rector of a country parish forty miles away forbade that; but during those five years (1848-53) of the Co-operation and "Christian Socialist" movement out of which the College grew, he played therein a leading part. That movement has had after effects far greater than any that were visible at the time. He threw himself into it with passionate ardour. One might then have called him the voice of Maurice to the general world; and it was a voice to which the world had to listen. "A genuine poet," Sir Leslie Stephen calls him, "if not of the very highest kind." (Where, indeed, can we find a thing more absolutely perfect of its kind than the four stanzas of "The Sands of Dee"?) He was denounced in the "religious" and tory papers as a revolutionary and a Chartist; while he was, as a fact, working his hardest to stop the mad schemes of the "physical force" agitators. I well remember the immense stir made by "Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet," a great book, in spite of obvious faults. It came as a trumpet-call to the conscience of all England. If a young man wants to get a vivid impression of the condition of working people at the birth-time of the College, and of the vast change which has come about in fifty years, "Alton Locke" will give it him.

I will not attempt to go over the long roll of College teachers, nor would it be of material interest to single out those among them who have become eminent in various lines

* The following were the ages (in 1854) of the first set of teachers and managers: Hughes, 31; Davies, 28; Furnivall, 31; Dickinson, 33; Ruskin, 35; Ludlow, 33; Mansfield, 35; McLennan, 27; Westlake, 26. I was the baby of the group, 22. Maurice was then 49; Kingsley, 35; Vansittart Neale, 44.

† The "Christian Socialist" (a little weekly paper), once gave its subscribers a lithographed portrait of Kingsley, which I stuck up in my rooms at Trinity, Cambridge. I remember a friend exclaiming: "Good Lord! here's that ——— chartist."

of life. One thing which the retrospect brings to my mind is the great change which time has brought about in the general feeling as to volunteer work of this kind done by well-to-do people for the benefit of the less fortunate. In the early fifties, when the College came up in conversation, it was, I remember, often plain that one's friends looked upon the scheme as more or less of a freak; it seemed so odd that we should be troubling ourselves about such things as teaching algebra or English composition to working people. In the chambers of an Equity Draughtsman where I was a pupil, I got the nickname of "The Professor," by reason of my teaching in Great Ormond Street, a little joke which in these days of Toynbee Halls and University Settlements would have no point. The great spread of this kind of effort has made the thing familiar; and I doubt not that the state of feeling which leads so many men now to join in it is in a great measure the result of Maurice's influence, transmitted through various channels of which the men affected thereby are unconscious. And, though technical education formed no part of the scheme he propounded, it is still the fact that the College played the part of pioneer in the movement which some thirty years later resulted in the establishment of the great London Polytechnics.

Of Maurice himself as a man, I hardly like to write; it is so difficult to put into words the kind of feeling which he inspired among those who came under the spell of his potent personality. From the wonderful face which looks at us out of Mr. Dickinson's magnificent portrait, there shone out the expression of a very great soul—one of the great souls to know whom is to feel the divine in man. In his presence—this is the most enduring impression I keep of it—it seemed as if everything petty or trivial, every small or unworthy thought, must needs shrivel up and vanish. It was not easy to know him well; he was shy, and had something of constraint in his manner, and few, I imagine, were closely intimate with him. But a very little intercourse sufficed to make one feel the nobility—I would rather call it the grandeur—of his character. Men of all beliefs and of no belief felt this equally. Perhaps the secret of the personal influence whereby he drew men to him and to each other, was the intense reverence he had for man as man, without regard to the thousand minor diversities of rank, occupation, race, ability, or outward circumstance. In deeds, his was a very noble life. He gave himself unsparingly, without thought of self to work for others, and was wholly, I should think, without consciousness of his own greatness. Kingsley said of him, "He was the most beautiful human soul I have known"; and Gladstone summed him up truly when he called him, in the words used by Dante of Saint Dominic, "that spiritual splendour."

To narrate the further history of the College would be beyond

the scope of this paper, and would require a careful examination of the whole of its records for the past four decades ; but I will add a few words as to one important crisis in its history. This was the time, eighteen years after its foundation, which followed the death of Mr. Maurice. He had remained our real governing head up till 1866, when he became Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge. That took him to live at Cambridge, but for a few years he came regularly to London for College work and for his weekly services at the Vere Street Chapel. In 1869, however, declining health made it impossible to continue this laborious life, and after that year he was seldom with us. Professor Brewer at this time was Vice-Principal. Then came Maurice's death in March, 1872. By that time most of the founders and early teachers had been taken away from the College by death and other changes. Their places had been taken by younger men ; but naturally the removal of the man who had so long been the governing spirit raised anxious questions. It was a crisis which put the College on its trial. The discussions as to the Principalship and future arrangements raised questions as to our constitution and government ; for heretofore our organization had been more or less of a provisional kind. The time had come, too, for making some definite provision for the permanent custody of the College property. At this juncture the Council sought aid and council from the students. The Executive Committee was enlarged to eight members ⁽¹⁾, with full power to carry on the College pending its re-organization ; and a Consultative Committee formed by the addition of four students ⁽²⁾ to the Executive, was charged to consider and report as to necessary changes. This Committee reported in January, 1873. Hughes was then elected Principal for a year. Occupied by work at the Bar and in Parliament, he was reluctant to pledge himself further. I was made Vice-Principal, with the power to nominate an Executive Committee.⁽³⁾ This *ad interim* government lasted for more than a year. The settlement of the Constitution occupied the Council at weekly meetings during a large part of 1873 ; and in 1874 we formed a body of fifteen Trustees, who were incorporated under the Companies' Acts ("The W.M.C. Corporation") to hold the College property. Hughes was re-elected Principal, and held the office till 1883, when he ceased to live in London. Special efforts were made, and successfully, to recruit the teaching and governing staff by enlisting men of the younger generations from the Universities. The new stream which then began to flow, for it was mostly independent of private or personal associations with the founders, brought us men such as Crawley, Bickersteth, Lefroy and Mure, who gave to the College years of

(1) Brewer (V.-P.), Rawlins, myself, Cave Thomas, Bevan, Tansley, Mozley, Martineau.

(2) Forster, Murray, Robinson, Catterns.

(3) Tansley, Forster, Murray, Bevan.

zealous work, and who, as they left us, generally from the pressure of professional or other work, brought into the College others to fill their places. Hughes had to resign the Principalship on being made a County Court Judge in 1883; and for the next fourteen years we had the advantage of the leadership of Sir John Lubbock (Lord Avebury). But during all this time the one man whose work and personality were the chief support of the College was he whose recent death we are now deploring, George Tansley. Many years since, in 1888, the immense value of his ceaseless work for the College, and through the College for the education of working men, was worthily recognized by the then Archbishop of Canterbury (Benson), who conferred on him the honorary degree of Master of Arts—a very rare exercise, to meet a very rare case, of that ancient prerogative of the primacy. Since that time to his death in March last, his love of the College led him to give to it, when freed from the cares of business, practically his whole energies and his whole time; and at the time of his death he controlled, as Dean of Studies, the whole educational work of the institution. All who have shared in the College work, those who know it best, the successive Vice-Principals, and their colleagues on the Council, have concurred in testifying that to his unique devotion—a devotion which, alas! made him forget the limits of his own strength—the College owes a debt which cannot be measured. In his loss it encounters a crisis graver in some ways than that of thirty years ago, complicated as it is with new difficulties, incident to the projected expansion of its work. Happily, the present Principal, Professor Dicey, gives not only his name and influence, but also ungrudging personal work to the service of the College. The Studies Committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. Lionel Jacob, is stepping into the gap—the great gap—caused by the death of the Dean of Studies; and the attraction of Mr. Tansley's life and the affection felt for his memory is shown by the influx of young University teachers, chiefly from Cambridge, who are keeping alive the spirit which founded the College nearly 50 years ago, and are giving good hope of continued and even greater success, when the new buildings and equipment, to be taken in hand almost immediately, are an accomplished fact.

R. B. LITCHFIELD.

October 1st, 1902.

NOTE by the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:—In the above sketch of the early days of the College, there is one omission which the Executive Committee think it right to supply. They wish to place on record their sense of the debt which the College owes to Mr. Litchfield himself for his services as teacher, Vice-Principal, and Bursar, during 47 years, including the most difficult times of the College History.

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